

## PHILOSOPHICAL BASE OF CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

We are pleased to present you with the Child Welfare Manual. This manual is the result of the Children's Division's (CD) effort to combine all child welfare components into a continuous child welfare practice that recognizes families for their individuality and their strengths.

The Missouri Children's Division (CD) has statutory responsibility and authority for accepting and investigating all reports of child abuse and/or neglect of children under the age 18. That authority comes to CD under RSMo Chapter 210. Other statutes (RSMo 207 and RSMo 211) charge CD with the responsibility of serving the needs of Missouri's children by providing remedial treatment services and, where needed, alternative placement outside the service home when such placement is in the best interest of protecting the child.

CD recognizes the family as the primary social welfare institution. Because families are irreplaceable, Division policies and practice must serve to strengthen and empower families. Toward this goal, the Division has adopted "Family-Centered Services" as its preferred service methodology.

The "Family-Centered Services" approach is founded on the principle that the first and greatest investments, time and resources, should be made in the care and treatment of children in their own homes. This means that resources, which have traditionally been expended on one family member, are more wisely invested in treating and strengthening the entire family. Therefore, our foremost obligation is to provide families with the services and support necessary to preserve and strengthen the family and prevent out-of-home placement. However, if the child can not safely remain in their own home, immediate steps must be taken to facilitate timely reunification and assure that other legally permanent plans occur when reunification is not possible.

The family-centered approach is in compliance with and facilitates the "reasonable efforts" policies of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, P. L. 96-272. It emphasizes placement prevention and family reunification and encourages services in the least restrictive environment. The family-centered approach places greater responsibility on, and confidence in, families and local communities.

Children's Service Workers will use family-centered techniques with the families with whom they work. Recognition is given to the fact that families are more likely to change when they are invested in a plan for change, rather than being asked to comply with the mandates of others. Also, this process must focus on the family as a system, rather than on any individual within the family. Therefore, parents and children will be given the opportunity for full inclusion in all phases of the assessment and service planning process. Full inclusion includes giving parents and children an equal and active voice in identifying the issues, which will result in safety and permanence.

The Children's Service Worker initiates the family-centered practice by establishing rapport with the family. Rapport begins with honesty of the worker and respect for the family. In addition to explaining that the worker is there to help the family help itself, the worker will also explain fully and openly, the purpose of the Division for contacting the family. The social work process should be fully explained. The Children's Service Worker shall clarify his or her role as well as the expectations that exist for the family.

The Children's Service Worker should also explain that the Division's involvement is time-limited. The agency's involvement will be completed when the family is meeting each child's need for safety and permanence.

Service plans will be developed from a strengths-based assessment which focuses on the strengths and needs of the family rather than on their problems. Goals and tasks will be relevant to the issues of child safety and permanence. Identification of resources shall be driven by the unique and individual needs of the family, not only by what is available. Therefore, the use of natural resources and helpers within the family and their community is expected. Creativity in community-based resource development is encouraged. Flexible funding is provided to facilitate meeting the needs of families, when they can not otherwise be obtained. Overall, family-centered practice should empower the family and encourage self-sufficiency, while meeting the children's needs for safety and permanence.

In order to embark on successful Child Welfare Practice the following principals are useful:

- All children and youth have great potential for growth when their basic developmental needs are met, including the need for safety, protection, love, nurturing, a spiritual and moral foundation, stability, a sense of belonging, and a hope for the future;
- No parent deliberately sets out to fail, whatever the outcome. There is probably no greater sense of failure than when one fails as a parent. Conversely, when families succeed because of our efforts to strengthen and empower them, everyone wins;
- Family problems are symptoms of their family system and send legitimate messages on how family members have attempted to cope. Therefore, the Children's Social Worker should approach family situations from a positive perspective seeking to learn what is or has gone well for the family; and
- All service needs identified with families should be addressed as quickly and effectively as possible by CD, the community and the family through the use of Family Support Team meeting. Family Support Team Meetings are meetings in which the family, CD, the court, the family's natural helper and the community meet to develop a treatment plan for the family.
- Each Children's Service Worker should ask themselves, how would they want to be treated, by service providers, if the worker was in the same situation as the family they are serving. The Children's Service Worker should then use that respectful and professional attitude with families and children.